

**When did Jessica start playing chess?**

Jess started when she was 7, at a very gentle level, just playing at her school club, Guildford High School and in local Surrey tournaments, none of which were ECF graded. I don't think she played any graded tournaments for the first 12-18 months, largely because I didn't know of the ECF's existence or about national junior tournaments that Jess could play in.

**At what stage was she seen as being a player with potential?**

Jess has been studying and training at a much higher level than her grades reflect for quite some time now and like many juniors she is under-graded. It's hard to be specific on this. I guess it was earlier this year when friends who are chess players and other parents started commenting on Jess's progress and her game play. We were as much surprised as some other parents when Jess was selected to play Board 1 in the U11 girls and U11 mixed final for Wey Valley/Surrey this year in the EPSCA inter-counties.

**Which people have been involved in coaching Jess?**

WFM Sarah Longson has been working with Jess for the past two years and she has been a great mentor for her; she is always so positive and she is a great champion of girls' chess. GM Nick Pert is Jess's coach at school and prior to the European Schools' Championship he and Jess worked hard on developing her understanding of different end-games. FM Adam Taylor was Jess's coach in Karkow and they clicked straight away and worked tremendously well together. I think the rapport between a coach and student is key and Adam brought out the best in Jess by letting her play to her strengths. For this reason, over the summer, we have brought Adam into Jess's coaching structure.

**How does Jess manage to combine chess with her school work and other interests?**

Term times are frenetic for our family as Jess also does a lot of sport. She swims 8 hours a week for our local club in Haslemere and competes in galas at weekends (when she isn't playing chess). She also runs, plays hockey and netball for her school. I don't think we had a free weekend from Christmas until May due to her various commitments. Her out-of-school timetable has to be organised for all of this to work including getting homework done and daily chess tactics/end games and playing online. Jess doesn't get much down time in the week, but she prefers to be busy and sees her friends in the holidays.

**What advice can you give to parents whose children are starting out on their chess journeys?**

Don't be put off encouraging your children to get into chess if you (and your partner) are not chess players yourselves. I used to think this was a big disadvantage when you see some parents who are highly graded or even have FIDE titles, but not any more. At some point, your child will need to find their own motivations and I imagine for some chess playing parents, it is extremely frustrating trying to coach their own kids who perhaps don't want to listen to them.

Also, really enjoy the wins and the successes because the losses can be very painful. We have had many miserable, lengthy car journeys home from competitions where Jess has not performed well.

### **Were you and your husband Richard surprised at Jessica's remarkable result in Krakow?**

I was hoping Jess would achieve 50% in Poland and even in the final few rounds I didn't think about medals, I just kept hoping Jess would win her next game and so on. Richard believed from the outset that she had an outside chance of success as she was 6th in the starting position and knew how well her training had been going. He got her to watch motivational videos on winning and what it takes to become a champion. Jess had the same routine every day: an hour before her game she would shower, put on her England top, eat a banana, drink a bottle of water, do 5 tactics and watch a motivational video. She actually did very little chess in Poland other than her allocated time each day with Adam. The hard work was done at home before we went.

As the tournament progressed, Jess grew in confidence and became so focused. She was in a good place mentally, very calm and happy. I think the painful loss in round 2 actually helped. Beating the Russian girl in round 7 was the turning point for us in terms of believing Jess could go all the way. We will never forget that moment, when Jess came out of the playing hall and gave us the thumbs up. Emotions were starting to run high at this point and Jess's last two games were equally as tense and stressful.

### **How do you see Jess's chess career developing?**

Chess is a massive commitment for the 3 of us, so as long as Jess continues to love playing and is self-motivated to study, then we will always support her endeavours. Jess is very ambitious with her chess and is delighted she has just got her WCM title. We'll continue to take one step at a time and not plan too far ahead; juniors can be very unpredictable.